

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CAIRO 004362

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/08/2015

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [KISL](#) [EG](#)

SUBJECT: GOE FORMALLY COMPLAINS ABOUT KORAN MISHANDLING
AFTER STEADY, BUT MUTED, EGYPTIAN MEDIA COVERAGE

REF: A. STATE 104406

[1](#)B. CAIRO 3763

[1](#)C. CAIRO 3647

Classified by A/DCM Michael Corbin for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Following media reports of Foreign Minister Aboul Gheit's condemnation of the alleged desecration of the Koran at the detention facility at Guantanamo Bay, the MFA called the Charge to complain about the reported mistreatment, explaining that it had delayed comment until the USG had completed its internal investigation. Egyptian media coverage of the alleged desecration has been steady, but muted, perhaps due to the timing of the story, which coincided with an historic referendum to change the presidential election process. Most media outlets offered straightforward reports on the story and the subsequent investigation, without much editorializing. Religious and anti-American publications took a predictably stronger tone, theorizing that USG denials were untrue. Comments made by the Grand Imam of Al Azhar and the Egyptian FM were widely reported, while one columnist used the incident to criticize regional leaders. End summary.

[1](#)2. (U) Recent Egyptian press reports highlighted comments from Egyptian Foreign Minister Aboul Gheit condemning the desecration of the Koran, and from the Organization of the Islamic Conference Secretary General stating that he had asked the USG to try soldiers involved in the alleged Guantanamo incidents. The June 6 edition of Al Ahram reported that Aboul Gheit, "speaking to the Foreign Affairs and Arab Affairs (parliamentary) committees, in what is considered the first official Egyptian reaction to the desecration from the Egyptian Government, denounce(d), tremendously, the desecration of the Koran and condemn(ed) all who took part in this work He added that the Egyptian Foreign Ministry is currently dialoguing with the American side on the matter." In addition, most dailies reported on June 8 new "revelations" that Israeli prison guards had used similar tactics of desecrating the Koran during Palestinian interrogations.

[1](#)3. (C) Following Aboul Gheit's comments in Parliament that the GOE was "dialoguing" with the USG on the matter, Shadia Farrag, the Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs for American Affairs, called the Charge to deliver a demarche to the USG on Koran desecration at Guantanamo. She stated that the GOE had not reacted to the original account in Newsweek of the allegations, choosing to wait for the USG to complete its own investigation. The results of that investigation having been published, Farrag said the GOE now wanted to express its strong condemnation of any mistreatment of the Koran. She added that the GOE perceived that the issue was causing popular outrage in Egypt. (Comment: Post is aware of only two moderately-sized demonstrations on this issue, one outside Al Azhar Mosque in Cairo following Friday prayers on May 20 and the other in Alexandria on May 27. End comment.)

[1](#)4. (SBU) Egyptian media outlets widely reported factual accounts of the initial allegations of Koran desecration at Guantanamo Bay and subsequent investigations, with little editorializing. The media's attention to the national referendum on an amendment to change the nature of presidential elections may partly explain the limited editorializing on the Koran desecration allegations. Opposition newspapers have devoted their pages to coverage of referendum-related violence and shortcomings of the amendment itself.

[1](#)5. (U) In contrast to the mainstream media, the weekly journal Aqidatti, a moderate religious newspaper, and the nationalist, anti-American Al-Osboa (circulation: 70,000) repeatedly published reports about the allegations, including stories that USG statements that the Newsweek story was inaccurate were untrue. One columnist in Al-Osboa of May 25 claimed that the United States, by its actions, had launched a war against Islam. Another, in the same issue, blamed the Egyptian Foreign Minister for failing to take a strong position on the alleged desecrations.

[1](#)6. (U) Aqidatti and Al Azhar newspaper (both limited in distribution) focused much of their reporting on the reaction of Sheikh Tantawi, the Grand Imam of Al Azhar, who, they

reported, sent an official request for information to the U.S. Department of State. Both papers reported that the State Department responded to the Grand Imam and assured him that the allegations of desecration were untrue. Agidatti claimed that this assurance was a lie. (Note: We understand that the Department received such a request via the Egyptian Embassy in Washington. Embassy Cairo has not initiated, and is not aware of, any USG response. End note.) On June 4, Al Ahram reported that the Grand Imam would be sending a second letter to the Department for further information following the release of the investigation report. On June 8, the religious weekly publication, Lewa Islami, carried a front-page story that Sheikh Tantawi, in a statement to the newspaper, said that he had asked the U.S. to punish those who had committed these crimes against the Koran, adding that a strong punishment would be the only way to ensure these acts were not repeated. He called on the U.S. to apologize to the entire Arab world.

17. (U) While many newspaper columnists used the story to criticize USG lack of respect for Islam, a columnist in the liberal weekly Al-Dustur (circulation: 70,000) wrote that Arab leaders had used the Guantanamo story to distract their people from local problems and to re-invent themselves as political and religious leaders. Khalid Salah rejected "those who use the Koran to serve their political interests and use all holy concepts as their primary lines of defense to defend their thrones and their seats of power."

Visit Embassy Cairo's Classified Website:
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/cairo>

You can also access this site through the
State Department's Classified SIPRNET website.

GRAY